

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 9, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015-16 Wolf Regulations and Landowner Take Quota– Final

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed for Presentation: 30 minutes

Background

Regulated hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan, which recognizes wolves as a native species and a part of the state's wildlife heritage. The plan aims to manage wolves similar to other species, such as mountain lions. Montana's wolf management is a success story that maintains a healthy, viable, well-distributed wolf population while reducing conflicts and livestock losses. At the end of 2014 there were at least 544 wolves in the state (there are known to be more wolves, but this is the number actually counted), down from a high of 653 wolves in 2011. The number of wolf-related complaints and livestock losses has also declined. During the peak year of 2009 there were 233 complaints and 309 livestock lost to wolves; in 2014 there 92 complaints and 41 head of livestock lost.

Montana has had a wolf hunting season since 2009 (except for 2010 by court order) and a trapping season since 2012. There were 206 wolves legally harvested in Montana during the 2014-15 season, 130 by hunters and 76 by trappers. This compares to a high of 230 (143 by hunters and 87 by trappers) taken in 2013. In addition six wolves representing a "potential threat" to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs were taken by landowners or their agents from July 2014 to present.

The current wolf hunting and trapping regulations are an archery-only season from the beginning of the deer/elk archery season until Sept. 14, a general hunting season from Sept. 15 to March 15, and a trapping season from Dec. 15 to Feb. 28, 2016. The per-person bag limit is five except in WMU 110 near Glacier National Park and in WMUs 313 and 316 near Yellowstone National Park where it is one per person. There are also total harvest quotas in these three WMUs of two in WMU 110 and three each in WMUs 313 and 316. The annual quota for landowners or their agents to take wolves on deeded property representing a "potential threat" to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs is proposed to be 100 total with each increment of 25 needing approval by the Commission.

There are no proposed changes to the wolf hunting and trapping seasons for 2015-16 or to the quota for landowner take, all season structures are proposed to remain unchanged from the 2014–15 wolf season.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment ended June 29. Comments were forwarded to the Commission.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposal may be approved as proposed or with adjustments.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

This status-quo proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and experience, livestock depredation trends, survey efforts, and public comment. It's consistent with wolf season objectives, considers the management of other species, and continues to value wolves as an integral part of functioning ecosystems. The proposal is consistent with the state's wolf plan.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the proposed 2015-16 wolf regulations and landowner take quota as presented by FWP.